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# THE Unexplained

MYSTERIES OF MIND SPACE & TIME

**A shock to science**  
**The 'Welsh triangle'**  
**Secrets of the grave**  
**Man into beast?**  
**Egyptian magic**

41



# THE Unexplained

MYSTERIES OF MIND SPACE & TIME

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What was the esoteric wisdom that enabled the ancients to build Stonehenge, the magnificent cities of South America and the statues of Easter Island? We search for an answer in **Ancient technology**. The introduction to our occasional series **ESP on test** describes the work of some of the scientists who brave ridicule to carry out research into parapsychology. As enigmatic and fascinating as the Comte de Saint Germain, the figure of **Fulcanelli** – reputedly a 20th-century alchemist who found the secret of everlasting life – is the subject of a new three-part series.

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**Psychical discoveries of the 19th century conflicted with the scientific picture of the Universe. But, as ARCHIE ROY explains, the scientists' complacency was shaken as they were forced to adapt their ideas to their own 'irrational' findings**

THE GREATEST OBSTACLE to acceptance of paranormal events is not the lack of evidence but the firmly entrenched belief that such events are impossible. Many eminent psychical researchers have drawn attention to this phenomenon – and, much to their dismay, have discovered it in themselves. Professor Charles Richet, a renowned physiologist and Nobel Laureate, a keen, sceptical and long-term researcher into alleged psychic phenomena, wrote the following after his carefully conducted series of tests of Eusapia Palladino, the famous – some would say notorious – physical medium:

But at this point a remarkable psychological phenomenon made itself felt; a phenomenon deserving of all your attention. Observe that we are now dealing with observed facts which are nevertheless absurd; which are in contradiction with facts of daily observation; which are denied not by science only, but by the whole of humanity – facts which are rapid and fugitive, which take place in semi-darkness, and almost by surprise; with no proof except the testimony of our senses, which we know to be often fallible.



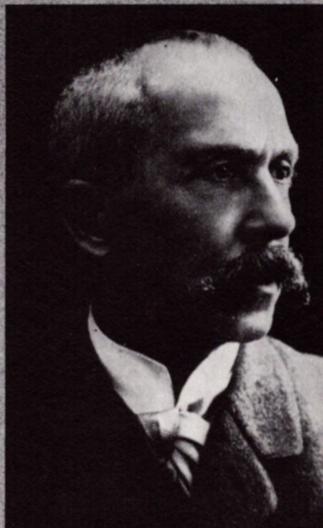
A table levitates at a London sitting of Eusapia Palladino in 1903. Careful investigators ascribed some, at least, of her phenomena to 'some supernormal cause'

## Outrageous and unthinkable

After we have witnessed such facts, everything concurs to make us doubt them. Now, at the moment when these facts take place they seem to us certain, and we are willing to proclaim them openly; but when we return to ourselves, when we feel the irresistible influence of our environment, when our friends all laugh at our credulity – then we are almost disarmed, and we begin to doubt. May it not all have been an illusion? May I not have been grossly deceived?... And then, as the moment of the experiment becomes more remote, that experiment which once seemed so conclusive gets to seem more and more uncertain, and we end by letting ourselves be persuaded that we have been the victims of a trick.

Everard Feilding, one of the most cautious investigators of the paranormal, also testified to the disorientating effect of prolonged contact with the incredible:

The effect of all this on my mind was



Charles Richet, a French physiologist, was convinced of Eusapia Palladino's genuineness

singular. I appeared to lose touch with actualities. Once admit the possibility of such things – and the mere fact of investigating them implied such an admission – where could one stop? I wrote at the time that I gradually began to feel that if a man seriously told me that the statue of the Albert Memorial had called in to tea I should have to admit that the question to be solved would not be the sanity of the narrator but the evidence for the fact.

Walter Franklin Prince, in his book *The enchanted boundary*, wrote of the strange spell psychic phenomena seemed to cast over many respectable men of science: they became so immediately antagonistic to the claims of psychical researchers that, without bothering to examine the evidence, they rushed into condemnatory print in terms so strongly emotive that, in any other field of scientific research, they would have lost any reputation they enjoyed.

One must not tumble, however, into the



Left: Katie King, allegedly a spirit materialised by the medium Florence Cook (visible at the left of the picture), photographed at a sitting in the home of Sir William Crookes. In the foreground is Dr Cully, another investigator. Katie was sufficiently substantial to be able to accept gifts of jewellery from an admirer. Crookes was one of the most eminent of those scientists who were open-minded enough to investigate mediumship and courageous enough to vouch for its authenticity

common pitfall of believing that because a pioneer is at odds with the establishment regarding alleged new discoveries, he or she must be progressive, an unacknowledged genius unjustly persecuted by a hidebound and reactionary authority. As Marx put it – Groucho, not Karl –

They said Galileo was mad, and he was proved right. They laughed at the Wright brothers, but they *did* fly. They thought my uncle Waldorf was cuckoo – and he was as mad as a hatter!

There is, of course, another strong motive for immediate antagonism towards psychical research and its findings from the intellectual establishments – a motive best expressed as a sort of equation of irrational identification:

psychical research = spiritualism = the occult = black magic = witchcraft = the superstitious dark ages from which science has rescued mankind

In the second half of the 19th century especially, scientists and other learned men looked back in horror at the follies, the cruelties and the miseries imposed on the population of Europe by the superstitious persecution of 'witches'. It is estimated that during the witchcraft mania a quarter of a million people suffered torture and a hideous death at the hands of their tormentors. Nineteenth-century thinkers, having seen the light of science dispel the darkness of those earlier ages, were determined to withstand any movement that threatened to extinguish that light.

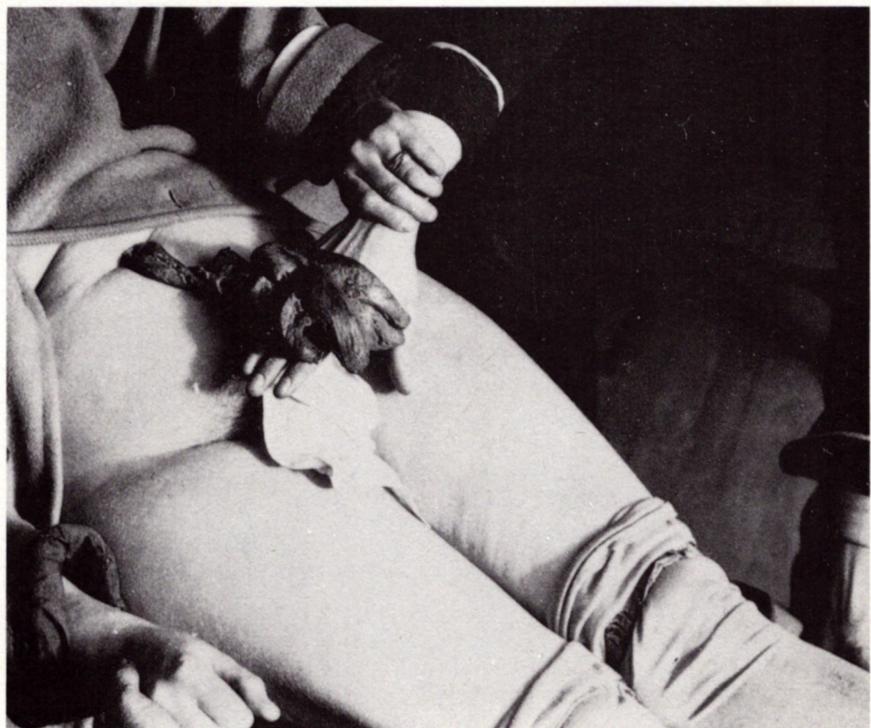
The belief in the impossibility of psychic phenomena was largely created because of the success of 19th-century science. It explained a host of celestial phenomena by applying Newton's law of gravitation and his laws of motion. One of the outstanding scientific successes of the century was the prediction of the existence of the planet

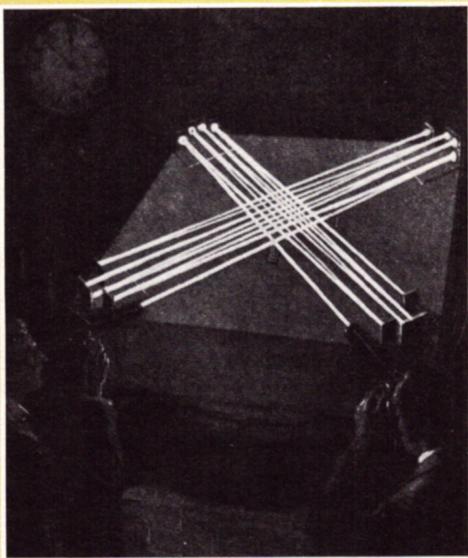
Below: dark ectoplasm is extruded from the navel of 'Margery' (Mrs Mina Crandon), an American medium active during the 1920s. Margery sat for a committee that was appointed by the magazine *Scientific American*. Her failure to convince them helped to strengthen the widespread conviction that science was in conflict with psychical claims. She was proved guilty of fraud on another occasion

Neptune, on the basis of its gravitational effects, before it was discovered with telescopes. Science came to understand a wide variety of natural phenomena, integrating in a seemingly universal theory of the physical world a large number of formerly separate fields, such as heat, light, electricity and magnetism. Clerk Maxwell's beautiful equations of electromagnetism gave an almost complete understanding of the electromagnetic field, leading ultimately to radio. In technology, too, Man's increasing use of his scientific knowledge in building bridges, ships, factories and trains, demonstrated how firmly based his mastery of nature was. It was not surprising that the only fear of scientists towards the end of the 19th century was that there seemed few, if any, jungles of ignorance left to be explored. One scientist expressed the belief that most scientific effort would henceforth be devoted to measuring physical constants to more decimal places.

#### The billiard-ball Universe

In this climate of opinion, most informed people believed that space, time, mass, the atom, energy, and so on were clearly understood. A body was made up ultimately of hard, billiard-ball-like atoms. Each atom always had a well-defined position and velocity. One could describe its space co-ordinates – its position – to any desired degree of accuracy, and by bringing in Newtonian time, which flowed uniformly, the rate of change of its space co-ordinates – its speed – could be expressed uniquely. Matter was indestructible: it could change its form from solid to liquid to gas, but it could never disappear – or appear. Energy likewise was indestructible, though it, too, could change its form. The potential for useful work stored





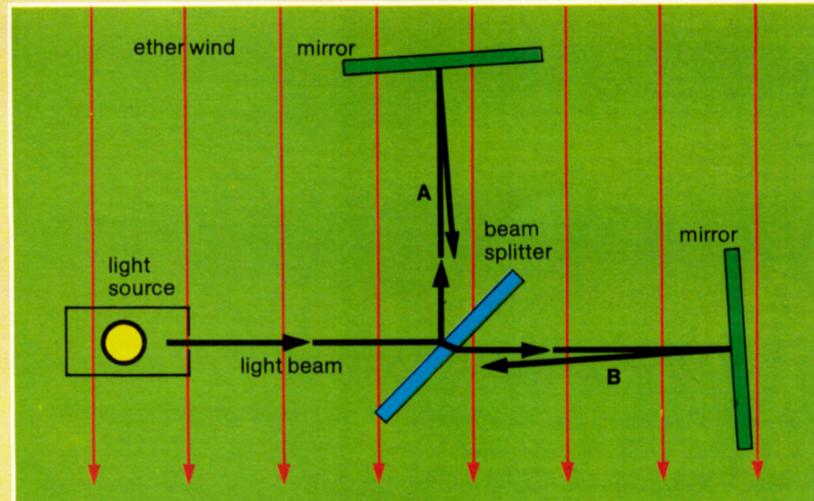
## In search of the ether

Left: a massive table floating on mercury provided a stable support for the optical instruments used by Michelson and Morley

Below: a light ray is split into two components. One travels parallel to the supposed ether wind, one at right angles to it

be rotated. In the orientation shown, one beam (A) would first be slowed down as it travelled against the ether wind, and then speeded up as it travelled with it. The net result would be that it took longer to make the round trip than beam B, which travelled across the ether wind. Michelson and Morley compared beams A and B and could find no difference in their travel times. Yet it was unthinkable that the Earth did not move. The only tenable solution was Einstein's theory of relativity, which abandoned the concept of the ether and drastically revised our ideas of space and time. Light is now regarded as sometimes behaving like a wave motion – though not requiring any physical medium for its transmission – and sometimes behaving like a stream of particles.

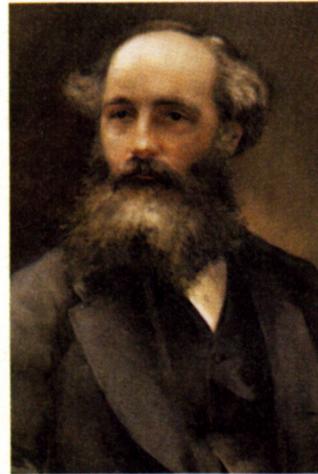
The crisis of Victorian science was marked by many baffling experimental results. One of the most important was obtained by the American physicists A. A. Michelson and E. W. Morley in 1887. Light was a form of wave motion and so, it seemed, must be carried in some extraordinarily tenuous and all-pervasive fluid, as sound waves are carried in air. Since the Earth moves in its orbit around the Sun at 18 miles (30 kilometres) per second, a strong ether 'wind' must be blowing over the planet. Michelson and Morley devised a sensitive experiment to detect it. A light ray was sent to a 'beam splitter', a mirror that partly reflected and partly transmitted the light. The whole apparatus could



in a coiled spring, in an electric storage battery or in a hot gas was energy in its different manifestations.

It looked, too, as if the functions of plants and animals could ultimately be resolved into physical and chemical processes. Man, too, was beginning to be understood. The great physiologists and neurologists such as Hughlings Jackson seemed to be demonstrating by their pioneer studies of neural processes that a sound mind presupposed a sound brain. The impairment of personality and mental functions caused by brain lesions of various kinds led many to the belief that the concept of 'mind' was superfluous. More and more researchers were adhering to 'epiphenomenalism', which asserted that mental events were purely a side effect of brain activity – reflecting it but not influencing it, so that an understanding of brain activity would be sufficient for an understanding of all mental processes.

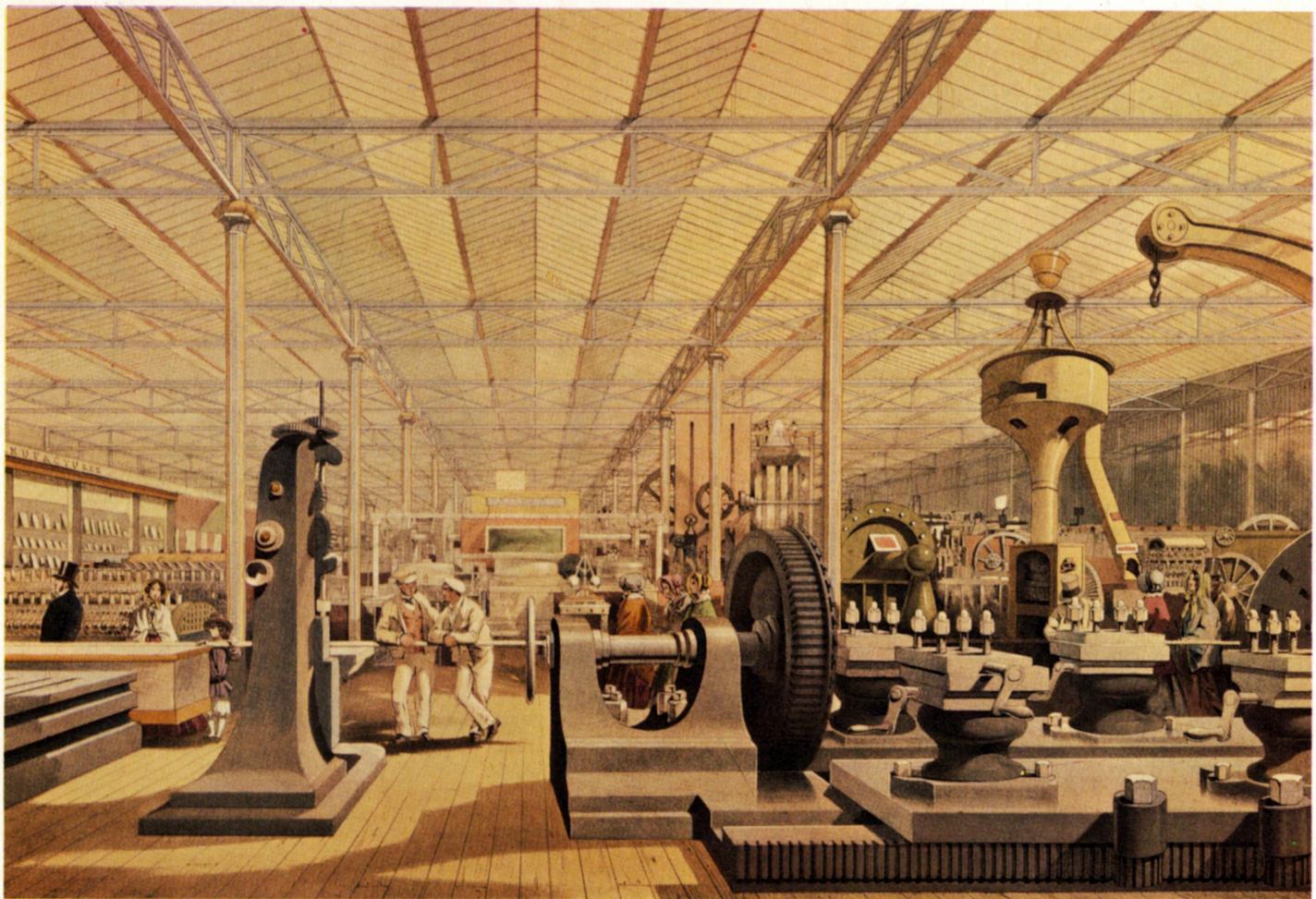
There were two other major theories, though they were losing their adherents. Parallelism regarded mental and neural events as running in parallel, without either



The brilliant physicist James Clark Maxwell, who conjectured that light waves were undulations in a subtle medium, the ether. The overthrow of the concept of the ether marked the fall of Victorian physics

being the cause of the other. This also made understanding of the brain sufficient for scientific purposes. Interactionism maintained that mind was as real as brain, existed separately from it, yet interacted with it. This would make an understanding of mental processes dependent on, but not entirely reducible to, processes in the brain. Very few thinkers at the end of the 19th century still believed this.

As far as the soul was concerned, it is fair to say that a good proportion of intelligent people refused to entertain such an outmoded and elusive concept. Lip service was still paid to the Church but, more and more, death was looked upon as the final annihilator of all human hopes. Most people, in fact, refused to think seriously about it at all until faced by the grim reality. Frederic Myers, the great pioneer of psychical research, was once in the company of a Victorian businessman whom he attempted to engage in conversation about Man's possible survival after death. The businessman was obviously uneasy and embarrassed. He refused to discuss the matter. Finally Myers



asked point blank: 'What do you think will happen to you when you die?' His companion's answer was: 'Why, I suppose I will enter into the joy of my Lord, but why talk about such an unpleasant subject?'

It is no wonder then that the alleged phenomena studied by psychical researchers found no lodging in the house of late-19th-century science. Telepathy, clairvoyance, psychokinesis, precognition and retro-cognition – all these branches of the paranormal were inexplicable according to the 19th-century world model. They were, in fact, downright impossible. Only a deluded and gullible fool would believe them.

And as if these weren't enough, what about the bizarre phenomena of the seance room, where mediums went into trances, were controlled by spirit guides and claimed to bring together the spirits of the dead and those still incarnate in this world? There were also many fully investigated cases of hauntings, both of places and of people.

Again, these things were impossible according to science and most scientists still ignored them or dismissed them with generalities about faulty reporting, fraud and human gullibility.

Yet among psychical researchers over the next century there were to be numbered some of the keenest and best-trained minds in Europe and the United States. For



Top: the Great Exhibition of 1851, held in London, showed off the machinery and manufactures of the Age of Progress. Superstition was in headlong retreat before science, which, it seemed, would make mankind the master of the planet

Above: matter proved to be transparent to x-rays – a 'paranormal' discovery of science, made by W. C. Röntgen in 1895

example, of the 52 presidents of the British Society for Psychical Research, 26 have held chairs in science or philosophy in universities, 10 have been Fellows of the Royal Society, four have held the Order of Merit and three have been Nobel Laureates. They have included the physicists Lord Rayleigh, J. J. Thomson, and Sir Oliver Lodge, the philosophers Henri Bergson and Henry Sidgwick, the classical scholar Gilbert Murray, the psychologist and philosopher William James, and many others equally renowned for their intellect and research achievements.

#### A change of climate

The critical and condemnatory atmosphere of former times has to some extent changed since the 1950s. Controlled experiment in psychical research has confirmed the occurrence of many types of psychic phenomena, such as telepathy, clairvoyance, psychometry, precognition and psychokinesis. For almost half a century, ever since the pioneering researches of J. B. Rhine in the newly created Parapsychological Laboratory at Duke University in North Carolina, workers in various parts of the world have conducted carefully controlled laboratory experiments on the paranormal. They have amassed results that could not be due to mere chance. If these had been produced in some other,

'respectable', research field they would have been universally accepted as valid.

An increasingly large number of departments engaged in parapsychological research in the United States, Europe and Russia have enlisted the aid of modern science and technology. Among the more interesting have been the psychic dream experiments carried out at the Maimonides Medical Center in New York City, where dreams were analysed to see if they had been influenced by the pictures studied by experimenters in other rooms as the subjects slept (see page 586). At Cambridge University's Department of Psychology, Dr Carl Sargent and his collaborators found that scenes watched by others influenced the images in the minds of conscious volunteers who had been relaxed and subjected to sensory deprivation.

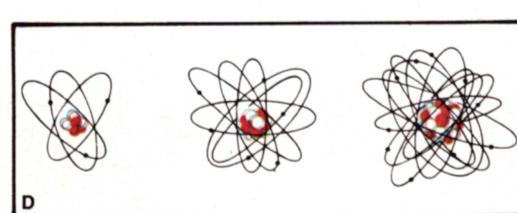
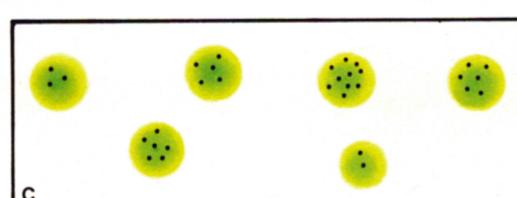
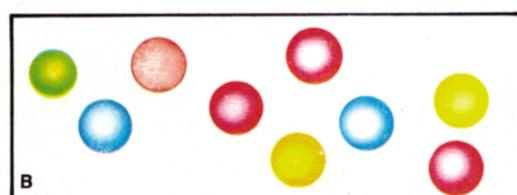
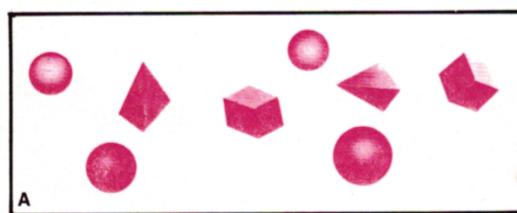
The new climate of opinion among professional scientists is mainly due to a growing realisation that the 19th-century model of the Universe is no longer valid. The physicists of the 20th century have demolished the old structure and in its place have installed a model possessing such wild properties that it makes the world of paranormal phenomena appear staid. With the construction of a new scientific world view, it no longer seems impossible that paranormal phenomena could be reconciled with science.

This new model could not have been foreseen by the Victorian physicist. It resulted from totally unexpected discoveries made towards the end of the 19th century. In

Warfare in the modern age – Vietnamese children flee a napalm strike on their village. In the 20th century human beings have inflicted suffering on each other on a larger scale than ever before. The human race – sadder and, perhaps, wiser than the crowds who thronged the Great Exhibition in 1851 – looks towards the future not with confidence but with a grim foreboding

1881 two American physicists, Michelson and Morley, tried to measure the Earth's velocity through the luminiferous ether, a medium supposed to carry light waves and to pervade the whole of space. They found themselves totally unable to detect its presence. It required the advent of relativity theory to explain this baffling state of affairs (see page 854).

In 1895 W. K. Roentgen discovered x-rays: a year later A. H. Becquerel noticed the blackening of an unexposed photographic plate in the presence of uranium and potassium compounds, thereby stumbling on

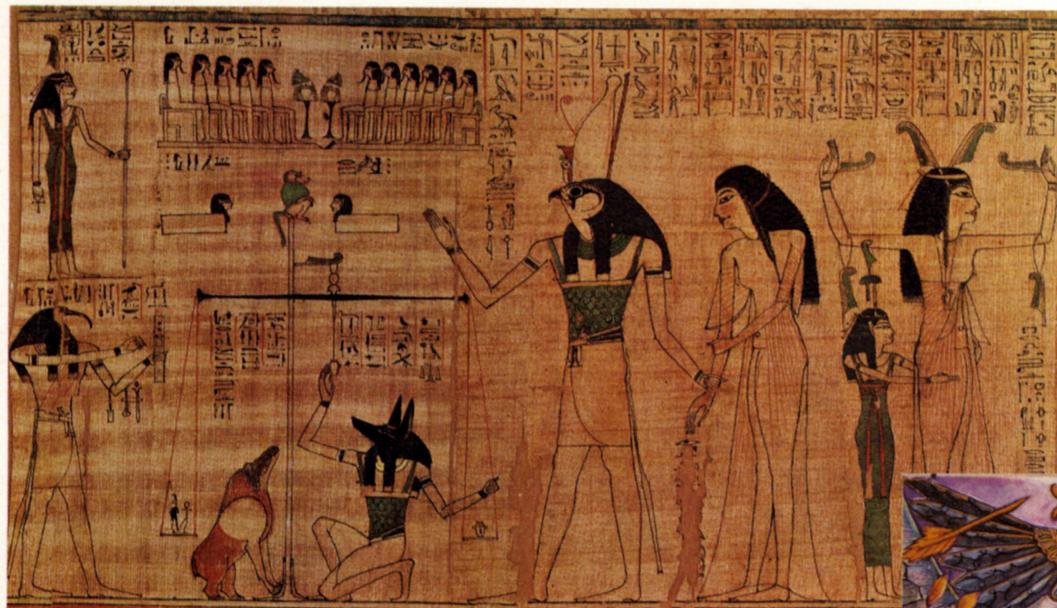


Left: the evolving concept of the atom. Democritus, a Greek thinker of 400 BC, regarded atoms as indivisible and made of one basic kind of 'stuff' (A). Differences in their shapes determined how they joined together and accounted for the properties of compounds. In 1803 John Dalton proposed that there were scores of qualitatively different types of atom (B). He was able to work out the relative weights of some of them. Only with the discovery of the electron was it realised that the atom was made up of smaller parts. J. J. Thomson suggested that atoms consist of electrons (negatively charged), surrounded by a cloud of positive charge (C). But Rutherford showed that electrons orbit around a central nucleus (D). Thus matter, apparently so solid, is largely empty space

radioactivity. By 1897 J. J. Thomson had reached a stage in his epoch-making researches where he was able to show that electrons – electrically charged particles – were over 1000 times lighter than the lightest atoms. The first steps into the strange world of the atom had been taken. Soon Einstein published his first papers. At the same time late-Victorian certainty was being further shaken by a parallel revolution, stemming from the discovery of the subconscious mind. Freud and Jung were embarking on their researches, which were to demonstrate that Man was not even master of his inner sanctum, the mind. In the world of the psyche, laws operated that were as alien to common sense as the new laws of quantum mechanics.

The bestiality and irrationality still present in that psyche became all too plain during the 20th century. Science was the handmaiden of many of the century's worst excesses, and forfeited its claim to be the guardian of progress. Science was no longer regarded as possessing a veto over claims formerly considered superstitious – at the very time that its own internal development was permitting it to become more open to paranormal phenomena.

*On page 854: how the physics of the 20th century has 'dematerialised' the Universe*



Left: the Papyrus of the goddess Anhai, from one of the Egyptian 'Books of the Dead', showing Anhai's soul being weighed against truth and justice, represented as a feather. Horus, Anubis and Thoth (as both ibis and baboon) attend the weighing

Below: 'the Magician' from the Tarot pack designed for Aleister Crowley by Frieda Harris. It features Thoth in his guises as Hermes and as a baboon



# Echoes of ancient Egypt

**Ancient Egypt persists in exerting a potent spell on our imagination and continues to inspire many occult systems. HUMPHREY EVANS outlines the history of our fascination with the land of the pyramids**

WHEN ALEISTER CROWLEY, the 'Beast of Revelation' and magus, published his commentary on the Tarot pack he called it *The book of Thoth*, proclaiming, as many other mystics and magicians have done, that it encapsulated the arcane wisdom of the ancient Egyptians.

Thoth was the scribe of the gods, who figured prominently in the ceremony of the 'weighing of the heart', the central ritual in the passage of a dead person's spirit from this world to the next. At this moment of trial, when Anubis, the jackal-headed god of the dead, laid the dead person's heart in one pan of a pair of scales to check that it balanced against a feather representing justice and truth, Thoth stood by to record the result.

Thoth had another role, however, one more tantalising than the straightforward task of keeping the register of those who could enter into the realms of bliss. He was the god of knowledge and of wisdom. And by the easiest of extensions, he became the god of magic. The ancient Egyptians believed that Thoth had set down, in books 'written with his own hand', the most potent secrets of all. Crowley and other modern necromancers have venerated Thoth as a continuing source of occult knowledge, thus enhancing

Below: statue of Seth, the renegade brother of the god Osiris. Seth, jealous of Osiris's superior power, killed and dismembered him, scattering the remains all over the land. Their confrontation continues to fascinate occult scholars as the archetypal battle between good and evil



the appeal of rituals and magical systems that draw on Egyptian symbolism.

As long ago as 1781, a minor French scholar named Antoine Court de Gébelin claimed, with absolutely no foundation other than his imagination, that the 22 trumps of the Tarot pack preserved the secret teachings of the Egyptians, deliberately disguised to avoid their exploitation by the uninitiated (the notion was happily accepted by later magicians, such as Eliphas Levi in the 19th century). At around the same time Count Cagliostro founded his Egyptian Rite of Masonry; for meetings he used a temple room in Paris furnished with statues of Isis and Anubis. Mozart, in his opera *The magic flute*, linked freemasonry with ancient Egypt and the mysteries of Isis and Osiris.

Ancient Egypt easily stimulates the occult imagination. For a start, there are the signs of an ancient and mystifying civilisation whose

great works – the pyramids and temples ranged along the Nile – suggest the use of powers and techniques that can still amaze the technological 20th century. Then there is the accent on death, or rather on the hope of an afterlife, that has provided a fascinating record of tombs and mummies. There are the hieroglyphs, the pictorial writing that seems to promise so much more than a simple alphabet. And there is the religion itself with its variety of transcendental beings from the mightiest of demiurges to the most localised of spirits.

The gods were closely allied to human life in ancient Egypt. The high gods, the gods with whom the kings identified themselves, represented just about every form of psychic power. The Sun-god Re ruled over the other gods and mankind. The Egyptian king called himself 'Son of Re'. Other gods, who started as local deities, joined with Re in compromise rather than in struggle. So Amun of Thebes became Amun-Re, and the priests of Ptah of Memphis explained that Re was his father as he, in turn, was the father of other gods.

In the myths telling of creation, the sky and the earth gave birth to other gods, Seth



and Osiris, and to the goddesses Isis and Nephthys. Osiris, the god of fertility and of resurrection in the other world, became the most important god of all. His wife, Isis, gave birth to Horus; with Nephthys, whose husband was supposed to be Seth, Osiris fathered Anubis, the god of death.

Osiris was good and bountiful. He taught the Egyptians to till and to cultivate the fields. He gave them law and religion. Seth, however, succumbed to jealousy and laid plans to kill him. Seth tracked down and dismembered Osiris, scattering his body across Egypt, but Isis was able to collect the parts together, bandaging them into the first mummy, and breathed life into him once more. Horus, the child they then conceived, went on to contend with Seth. A memorial tablet left by one king of Egypt told of his knowledge of the god:

Your nature, Osiris, is more secret than



Above: statue of Osiris with his crook and flail, representing his role as inaugurator of Egyptian agriculture. These symbols are also used in today's occult regalia

Right: Isis suckling Horus; the 'madonna-and-child' played an important part in the resurrection-based Osirian religion

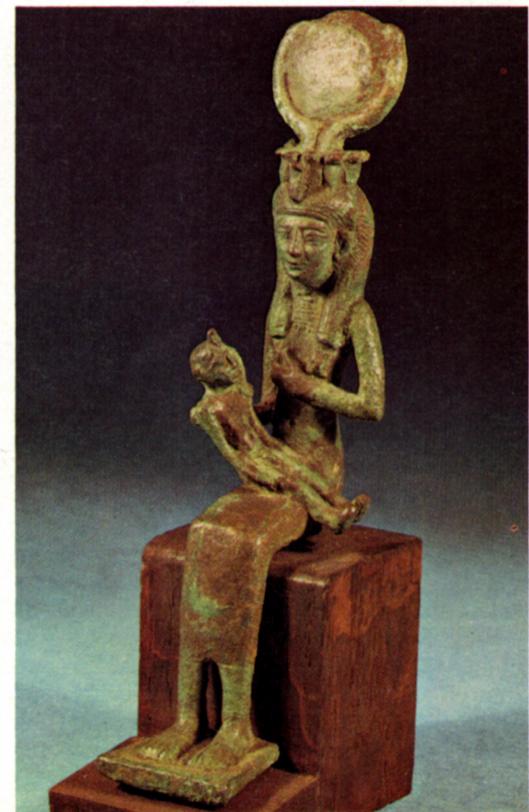
Left: the Sun-god Re in his boat. His falcon head shows how he came to be identified with Horus



Below: Thoueris (or Ta-urt), the goddess of childbirth, who was often represented as a hippopotamus standing on its hind legs

other gods. You become young according to your own wish. You appear in order to dispel darkness, for the gods and magic come into existence to illuminate your majesty and bring your enemies to shambles.

Lower gods in ancient Egypt concerned themselves with everyday affairs. One of the oldest of the Egyptian deities, Thoueris or Ta-urt, was goddess of pregnancy and birth. Any woman in Egypt might pray to her statue or wear an amulet that showed the goddess as a hippopotamus standing on its hind legs. The god Bes became husband to Thoueris and he too, despite a fearsome appearance, was a friend to all.



People sought out 'consultations' with these gods in ways that link with the much weaker forms of fortune-telling and dream interpretation in use today. Someone seeking advice might spend the night in a temple courtyard in the hope that the god would appear in a dream. Attendants, magicians and dream interpreters thronged the temples to offer their help. One formula that was guaranteed to produce a vision of the god Bes involved, first, writing out a petition to the god with an ink that included ingredients such as the blood of a white dove. Then:

Make a drawing of the god on your left hand and wrap your hand in a strip of black cloth that has been consecrated to Isis and lie down to sleep without speaking a word, even in answer to a question.

Much of the impact that ancient Egyptian society has had on the modern imagination



The union of Geb, god of the earth, with Nut, goddess of the sky, which resulted in the births of Osiris, Isis, Seth and Nephthys

stems from the massive accumulation of material associated with the tombs and with mummies. The ancient Egyptians believed that life could continue after death. To ensure that this would happen they provided the dead person with an illustrated guide, the 'Book of the Dead', which might be inscribed on a papyrus left with the body or painted on the coffin or a wall of the tomb. The 'Book of the Dead' shows the tests through which a spirit must go before merging with Osiris in everlasting life. It gives, with detailed precision, the responses that a spirit must make to persuade the gods to give judgement in its favour. The drawings – of scenes such as the 'weighing of the heart', of gods and of creatures such as the dreadful beast Amemt, who waited to devour the heart that was found wanting – have provided a starting point from which many artists, among them Austin Osman Spare, painting earlier this century, have derived their symbolic motifs.

Mummies fascinated travellers from other countries. In medieval times, Arab physicians decided that ground-down mummy made a useful remedy for many ills. The belief passed to Europe, and in the 16th and 17th centuries speculators shipped out vast quantities of 'physic'. During the 19th century public unwrappings of mummies became a popular entertainment – even an archbishop of Canterbury was once turned away from a lecture hall packed to capacity. In 1827, just 10 years after Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley had written *Frankenstein*, Jane Webb published *The mummy*. At the high spot of the action, two of the characters climb into the Great Pyramid, carrying with them a galvanic battery, and literally shock the mummy of King Cheops back into life.

A fearful peal of thunder rolled in lengthened vibrations as the mummy rose slowly from its tomb. Edric saw the mummy stretch out its withered hand as though to seize him. He felt its

tremendous grip. Then all was darkness. . . .

This fantasy has become the source of many film plots, from *The mummy*, with Boris Karloff, in 1932, to *The awakening*, with Charlton Heston, in 1980 – to say nothing of *Abbott & Costello meet the mummy* in 1954.

Later ages made their own interpretations – and misinterpretations – of the realities of ancient Egypt. The Greeks and the Romans who dominated the country in the few hundred years just before and after the time of Christ already thought of Egypt as a land of inexplicable mysteries. When the Arabs conquered Egypt they spun wondrous tales about the riches and powers that the ancient kings had once possessed. They told of caskets piled high with sacred symbols made of gold, weapons fashioned out of iron that could not rust, glass that could be bent without breaking, books made of leaves of gold that contained the history of the past and prophecies of the future.

As Europeans began to travel to Egypt, increasing amounts of titillating information

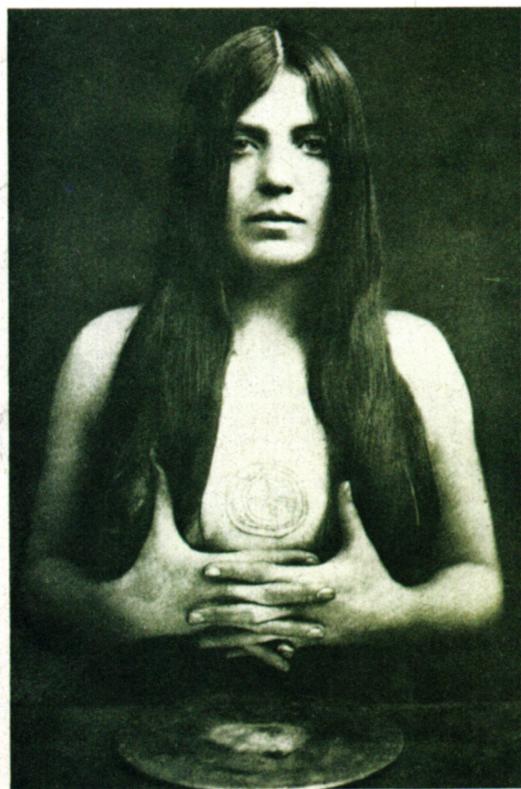
Fantastic stories of the resurrection of ancient Egyptian mummies all derive from Jane Webb's *The mummy* of 1827. The tale has since become a fertile source for horror films, offering title roles to numerous actors including Lon Chaney Jr in *The mummy's curse* (below left) and Christopher Lee in *The mummy* (below)



trickled back to the West, and by the 18th century Egyptiana had been taken up by the fashionable as part of the general enchantment with Classicism. Artists inserted pyramids, obelisks and sphinxes in their fantastic landscapes. Sir Isaac Newton dreamed up a new chronology for Egyptian history while trying to synchronise the list of Egyptian kings with the eras of biblical history. A French writer, Jean Terrasson, collected together all the extant Greek and Roman descriptions of Egypt and turned them into a vast novel, the *Life of Sethos*. Others pondered on the significance of hieroglyphs, assigning meanings to them according to arbitrary whims; for instance, Thomas Greenhill, a London surgeon, confidently proclaimed in 1705, in a book subtitled *On the art of embalming*, that the crocodile was the emblem of malice and the eye the preserver of justice, and that the right hand, with its open fingers, signified plenty.

All this speculation was suddenly given a solid basis of fact after Napoleon invaded Egypt in 1798. A detachment of soldiers working on some fortifications near the coastal town of Rosetta turned up a slab of basalt carrying an inscription in Greek, hieroglyphs and a demotic script that was a simplified form of Egyptian writing. Scholars could now work out how to read the hieroglyphs, although the task of deciphering them fully took another 20 years.

From then on, interest in Egypt grew and grew. Some travelled to Egypt to study its ancient civilisation. Others went to plunder as many antiquities as they could. Europe became familiar with the temples and pyramids, the giant statues and the evocative



Two potent symbols used in Egyptian amulets as a protection against evil were the Eye of Horus (below) and the ankh (bottom), the key-like cross that represented life. Both of these symbols are incorporated into modern occult ceremonials

script. The influence of ancient Egypt showed up in areas such as furniture design: the Egyptian motif became part of both the Empire and the Regency styles and lingered on into Art Nouveau. Egyptian temples even provided the model for buildings, such as cotton mills in the north of England. Obelisks found their way to Europe and the United States. Organisations such as the Egypt Exploration Fund, founded in 1882, made Egyptological research generally available, and a burgeoning coterie of mystics incorporated the information into their magical systems.

H. Rider Haggard, writing in the 1880s, drew on the fashionable Egyptian apparatus of hieroglyphs and burial places, embalmments and resurrections in his books



Left: Leila Waddell, one of Aleister Crowley's string of mistresses and magical assistants who were collectively known as the 'Apes of Thoth'. Crowley's burning ambition was to find one who was such an accomplished medium that he could contact his guardian angel through her

*Cleopatra and She, the story of Ayesha (She-who-must-be-obeyed), a doomed love affair spreading across millennia.*

Aleister Crowley held that the true source of all wisdom was Seth, who was later worshipped as Satan. Seth, he claimed, had appeared to him while he was in Cairo in 1904, in the form of a bodiless intelligence named Aiwass, and had dictated to him the three chapters that make up *The book of the law*. This is the book that expounds the basic Crowleyian principle: "Do what thou wilt" shall be the whole of the law.'

In Egypt Aleister Crowley, who would later refer to his string of mistresses as the 'Apes of Thoth', looked for revelations in the Cairo Museum. Crowley regarded himself as the beast of Revelation. The number of the beast is 666 (see Revelation 13). Exhibit 666 in the museum was a painted tablet commemorating an Egyptian priest, Ankh-f-n-Khonsu. Crowley decided that he had been Ankh-f-n-Khonsu in a previous life. He was also convinced that a new Age of Horus was about to replace the passing Age of Osiris with its resurrection-based Christian faith.

And the connection persists. The ancient Egyptians were given to wearing protective amulets, of which the most symbolically impressive was the Eye of Horus. Even today a bracelet of lucky charms may carry its distant relation, a tiny symbol of an ankh (a key-like cross), the Egyptian sign for life.

*Why – and how – did the ancient Egyptians raise the pyramids? See page 841*

# The story of the 'Welsh triangle'

**The astonishing series of events in Dyfed in 1977 drew UFO enthusiasts and investigators from all over the country. But, says HILARY EVANS, the west Wales flap was not quite what it seemed**

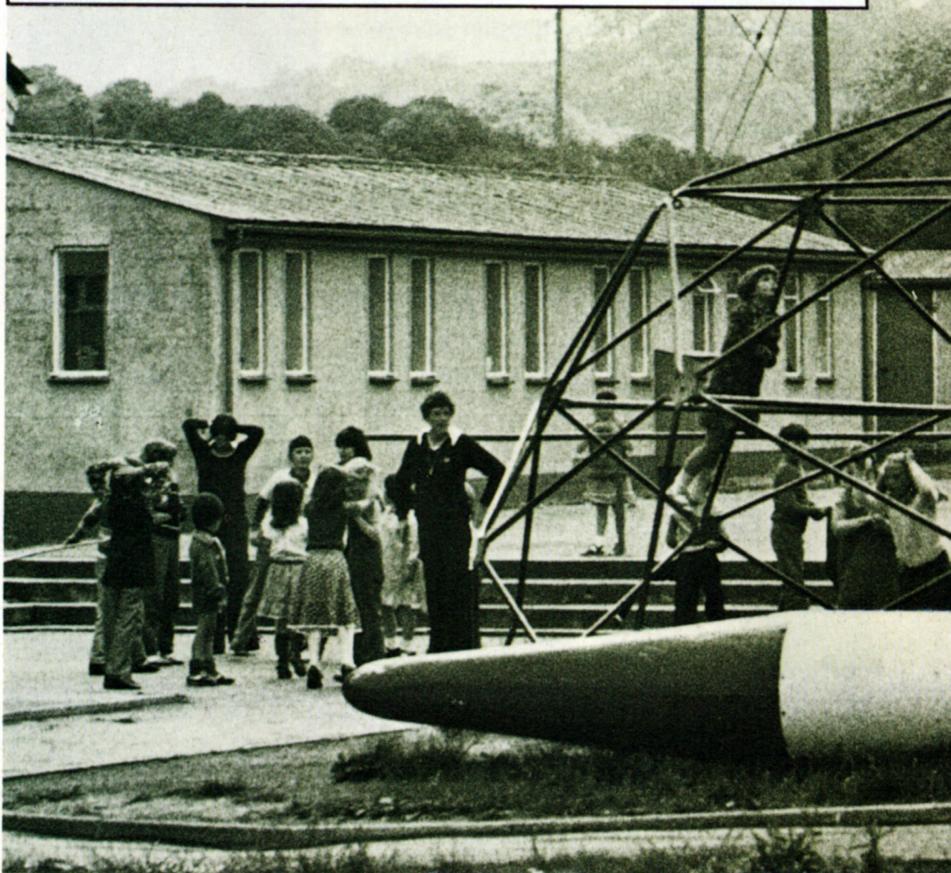
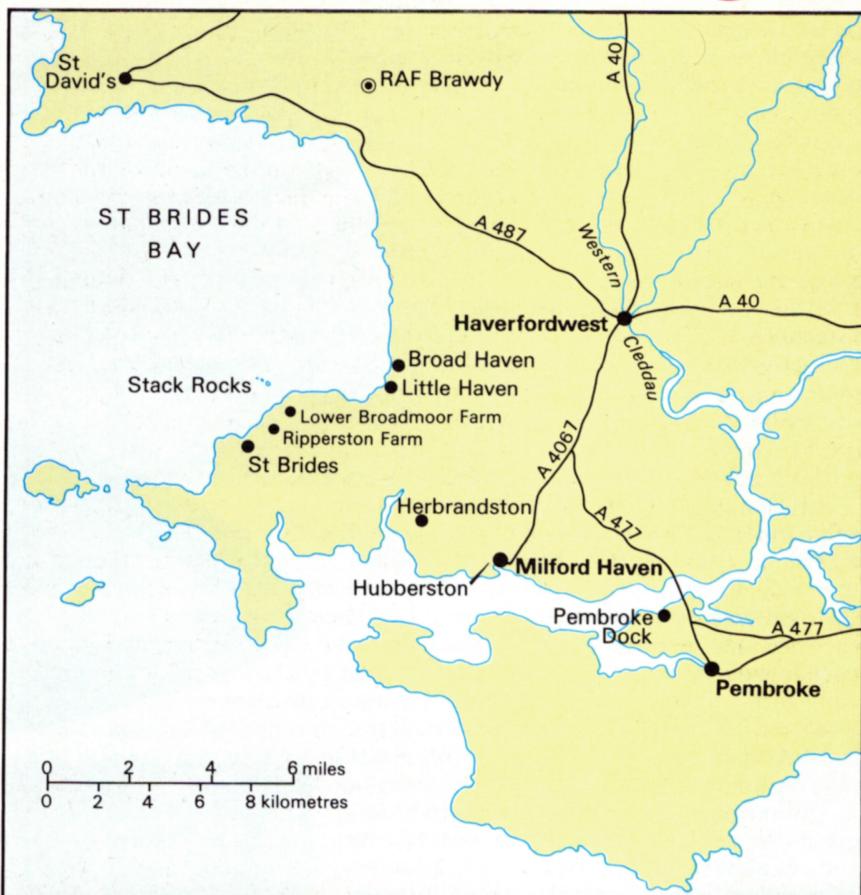
UFOS IN THE SKY and on the ground. Cars pursued by orange footballs. Glowing cigars hovering over schools. Discs flying into solid rock and vanishing between sliding doors. Silver-suited entities with no faces stalking across fields and peering through cottage windows. Mysteriously malfunctioning cars, television and radio sets. Visits from sinister aliens with psychic powers. The teleportations of entire herds of cattle. Such, if the reports are to be believed, are just some of the extraordinary events that occurred not in some far-off land but in peaceful, homely Wales, and not at some distant time but as recently as the spring of 1977.

Are these astonishing reports to be believed?

In so accessible a region, and at so recent a date, there should be no problem about ascertaining the facts. Yet already discrepancies are apparent that may never now be resolved. The local paper, the *Western Telegraph*, did an excellent job of reporting the events as they occurred, but the affair attracted wider attention. It brought into west Wales reporters from the national press and television; it lured investigators, some competent and some not; it enticed unscrupulous authors. Between them they created a confusion that is well-nigh impossible to disentangle. Accounts vary from one version to another; dates are incorrectly stated; the order of events is confused. And, as we shall see, the personal bias of some investigators, the desire of certain reporters for a 'good story' regardless of truth, the gullibility of some witnesses and the suggestibility of others – all these have combined to add distortion to confusion. Does this mean that the west Wales 'flap' doesn't deserve our attention? On the contrary, it remains a classic case – but not quite in the way it has been made out to be.

The build-up to the events of 1977 had begun before the close of the previous year. Already residents of this remote corner of Wales were reporting UFO sightings on a scale that led Randall Jones Pugh, a local British UFO Research Association investigator who was interviewed by a journalist on 13 January, to forecast: 'The country is in for a spate of such incidents.'

His prediction was confirmed on the afternoon of 4 February, when he received a telephone call from the mother of a pupil at



nearby Broad Haven primary school, saying that her son, along with a dozen other children, had seen a UFO that afternoon, over a period of some hours, on the ground close to the school.

Although, the Broad Haven school incidents were not the most sensational events of the west Wales flap, they were the first to alert the general public to the fact that something extraordinary was taking place in the locality. And, unlike some of the later occurrences, the facts – if not the explanations for them – are reasonably well-established.

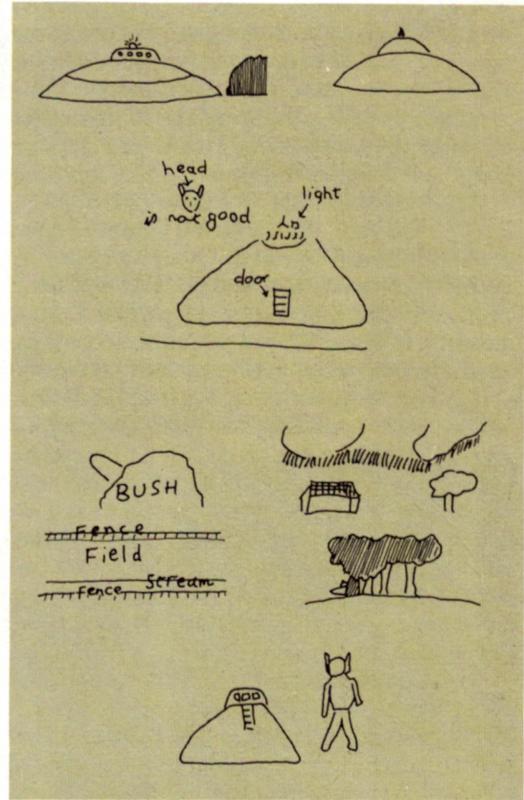
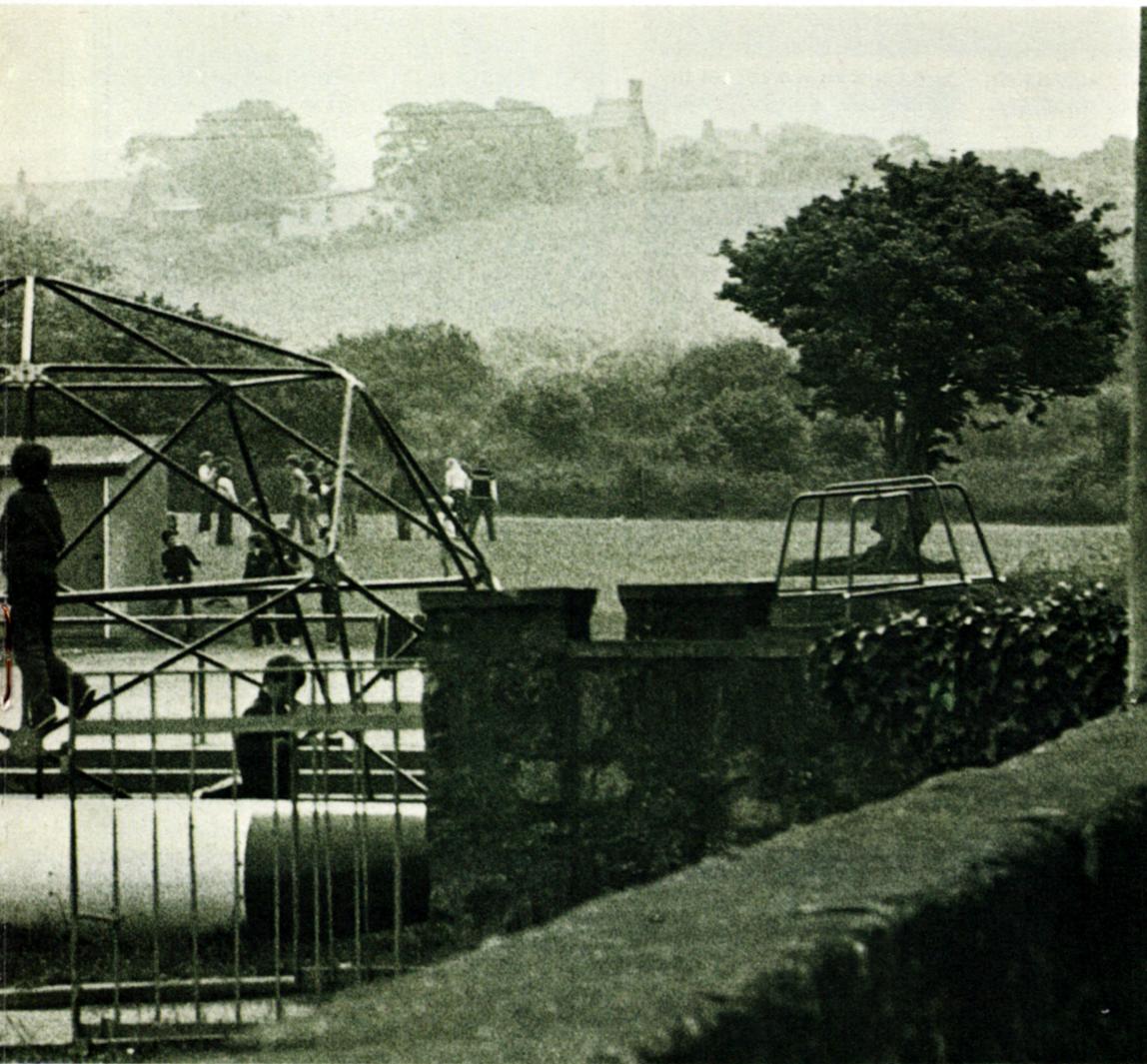
The first sighting took place during the lunch break, when a group of boys aged between 9 and 11, who were playing football in a field beside the school, noticed an unfamiliar object in another field close by. It was apparently at ground level and was partly obscured by trees and bushes, so that they could discern only its upper portions; they could see enough, however, to feel sure that it was a UFO. Some of the boys rushed into the school with the news; others came out to see what it was. Eventually there were 15 children who saw the object.

They described it as being 'as long as a coach or maybe a bit longer'. One description

Left: the area of Dyfed in west Wales where a wave of UFO activity was reported over a period of several months in 1977

Below: the primary school at the village of Broad Haven in Dyfed where 15 children claimed to have seen a UFO on 4 February 1977. The object was first seen at lunchtime in a nearby field; when the children came out of school at 3.30 p.m. it seemed to have disappeared, but then it rose into the air from behind a bush.

However, when the field was examined later no traces of a landing could be found



Above: some of the drawings made by Broad Haven schoolchildren to illustrate what they had seen. Many of the witnesses described a silver, cigar-shaped object with a dome on top; some reported a flashing light on the dome, and that the object seemed to be humming. Six of the children said they saw one or two beings near the UFO and described a small, silver-suited man with long, pointed ears

## Dyfed enigma

was of two saucers stacked one against the other to make a sort of dome, with a round 'ashtray' added to make a smaller dome on top. One boy saw three or four windows around the edge, on top of the dome; others thought they saw 10 or 11. Several thought they saw a light flashing on top, and one witness claimed that it was red. One saw a door in the side, with a runway leading down from it. Some, but not all, heard a humming sound. In addition, six of the witnesses reckoned that they saw one or two entities near the object. 'We saw something come out of it. It had a helmet,' said one. A second described 'a silver man with spiked ears', while a third added, 'He wasn't a very tall person, and he didn't look very nice either.'

The children watched the object for some 20 minutes. Two of them went to tell the headmaster, but he does not seem to have been sufficiently convinced to come to see for himself, though one boy 'was nearly crying because he was scared that he was going to be disintegrated or something'.

At 2 p.m. they went back into class, to re-emerge at 3.30. Naturally, they returned to the field at once to see if their UFO was still there. At first they couldn't see it and tried to get closer, though this meant crossing a fence and a stream. But just then the UFO popped up again from behind a bush, and they all took to their heels. This time they reported, 'The cigar object seemed to be tugging an object which was silver.' Again it disappeared behind a bush.

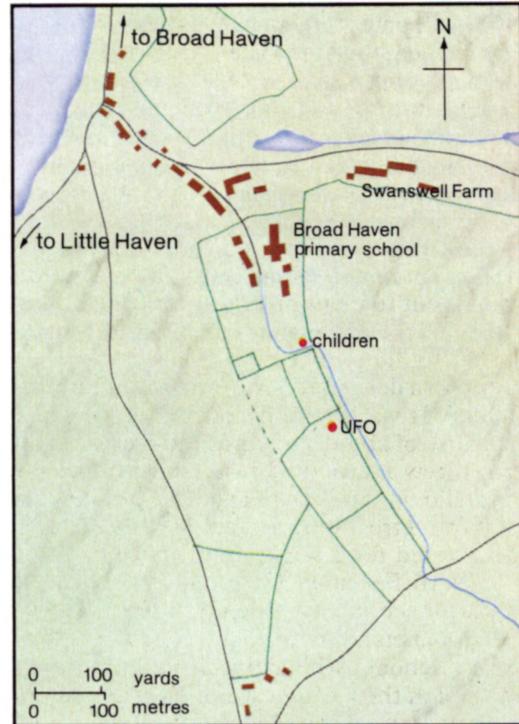
Many of the children told their parents about the incident when they got home. Randall Jones Pugh's name was familiar in the region as that of the local UFO specialist, so it was natural that he should be the first to be contacted. At 6 p.m. he visited the site with one of the boys. By now, however, it was raining heavily, and the light was fading fast,

so he returned next morning, with a reporter from the *Western Telegraph*. However, no traces of the landing were to be seen.

News of the occurrence spread rapidly, and the tiny seaside village immediately found itself the centre of intense interest. On Monday the headmaster overcame his initial scepticism and asked the witnesses to draw what they had seen. By this time the children had had plenty of opportunity to discuss the matter both among themselves and with enquirers and reporters: the consensus was that they had seen a silver, cigar-shaped object with a dome and possibly a light.

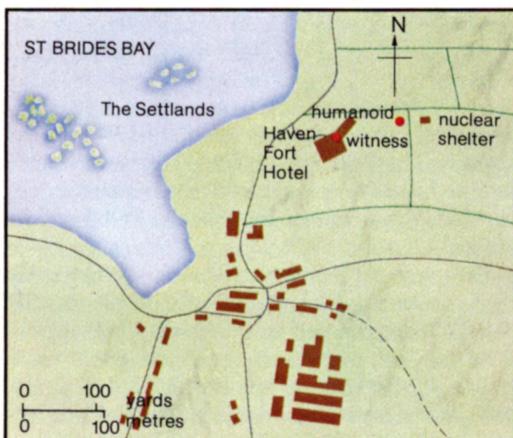
It was in much the same terms that, two weeks later, one of the teachers described a

Below: witnesses point out the site of the alleged UFO landing (right) for newspaper reporters. About two weeks after the first sighting, a teacher watched a large silvery object glide away from the same spot, and a couple of hours later two canteen workers at the school saw a strange object in the field. The canteen ladies, however, firmly believed that what they had seen was a tanker from the nearby sewage works; they visited the site with their husbands the next day to look for tyre marks, but found none



large object that she had seen on the same spot, though she glimpsed it only for four or five seconds and in pouring rain. She was about to call others when it glided away with a humming sound. Later that day two other adults, canteen workers at the school, noticed an object in the same place, saw a figure climb into it and watched it move up a slope. They did not think for one moment that they were watching a UFO but considered that it was a vehicle associated with the sewage works close by. Even when it was pointed out that it would have been very difficult for any type of vehicle to get to that location, they refused to accept that they had seen a UFO.

Despite their scepticism, the Broad Haven school sighting, taken at face value, appears to be quite convincing. There are, however, some additional factors that investigators at the time failed to take into account: these we shall consider when we have looked at some of the other sightings reported from the area. For from then until the late summer hardly a week was to go by



Left: the site of a UFO landing reported by Mrs Rose Granville, proprietor of the Haven Fort Hotel (below), on 19 April 1977. The witness claimed to have seen two humanoids apparently examining something close to their craft. Local BUFORA investigator Randall Jones Pugh has pointed out that there is a nuclear shelter at the site for the use of the Royal Observer Corps. Did this attract the ufonauts?

without some fresh incident being reported in the neighbourhood. Public interest was kept simmering not only by newspaper reports but also by widespread discussion, by visiting reporters for press and television and by investigators from UFO organisations. For the next six months or more, UFOS were to be front-page news in the area.

Here, taken from among 45 cases described in minute detail in reports and interviews, not to mention others reported in less detail, are a handful of selected incidents.

On 10 February two 12-year-old boys saw a UFO in a field near Haverfordwest grammar school. It was a blue flashing light, seen at a distance of about 130 yards (40 metres). One boy threw a stone at it, whereupon it took off; as it did so, an orange cigar shape about 16 feet (5 metres) long materialised beneath it. It hovered for a while, then vanished.

On 16 February Graham Howells, a 13-year-old schoolboy of Pembroke Dock, saw a bright, metallic object hovering over Pembroke school as he arrived in the morning. Although the weather was misty, he claimed a clear view of the object, which had

a dome in the middle which was dark grey most of the time, but flashed to a dazzling white about every five seconds. It resembled a plate with a burnt fried egg on it. Around the rim of the 'plate' it had greenish-yellowish lights and what seemed to me to be retro-rockets. The 'plate' seemed to be revolving as well. . . . I'm sure it wasn't a helicopter or a weather balloon.

On 13 March Stephen Taylor, aged 17, saw a UFO at about 9 p.m. It was a glowing light with an orange halo around it. He went to the house of some friends to tell them about it, but they did not believe him. About half an hour later, in a field, he saw a dome-shaped UFO about 20 feet (6 metres) high and stopped to look at it. Then a figure like a tall man approached, wearing a semi-transparent suit and a kind of spaceman's helmet. 'I was so frightened,' Stephen said, 'that I just took a swing at it and ran.'

On 7 April, Cyril John, aged 64, woke at about 4.45 a.m., disturbed by a strange orange light pulsating in his bedroom. It

came from outside and was reflected off the walls. He got up, looked out of the window and saw that the sky was orange.

Immediately outside here I saw two silvery-coloured objects. The first was like a very large Easter egg, about 4 feet [1.2 metres] in diameter, and it was swinging back and forth a little above and behind the chimneys of the house opposite. I then saw an object like a man in a silvery boiler suit about 40 feet [12 metres] above my window. It was at least 7 feet [2 metres] tall, and it hung stationary, on a level with the 'Easter egg'. Its attitude was in the position of a free-fall parachutist. . . . It hung



Four remarkably similar versions of the Broad Haven UFO, drawn by children from the school. The witnesses made the drawings independently, but not until three days after the sighting, so they would have had plenty of time to discuss what they had seen

motionless in the sky, face-downwards, for about 25 minutes. The 'egg' then moved up above roof-level and glided away sideways, as did the figure.

On 19 April Mrs Rose Granville, proprietor of the Haven Fort Hotel, was just going to bed, at about 2 a.m., when she was disturbed by a strange humming sound. At first she took it for the central heating, but then she realised that it was something unfamiliar. A flash outside her window caused her to look out: she saw a bluish light circling around, pulsating as it went. She got her binoculars and saw an oval object resting on the ground and, near it, two figures in 'whitish, plasticated' clothing like boiler suits; they had no faces. When the local newspaper printed a picture of a hoax spaceman and suggested that this was what she had seen, she wrote an indignant denial.

With cases such as these being reported almost every week, it is not surprising that as early as 17 February investigator Randall Jones Pugh commented to a local reporter: 'There's certainly a minor flap down here.' On 28 April he told the same paper that he was planning a book on the sightings. No doubt he was encouraged in this venture by a further series of events, which were even more extraordinary: the astonishing incidents reported by the inhabitants of Ripponston Farm, just south of Broad Haven.

*On page 834: more UFO sightings – and a visit from the sinister men in black*

# The werewolf sickness

**Many of the werewolves of the past have been explained away as mad, or as sufferers from diseases such as rabies. But, argues IAN WOODWARD, this does not dispose of the nagging question: do werewolves really exist?**

ALTHOUGH THE ANCIENT GREEKS and Romans and, to some extent, the ancient Arabs, believed in the occasional, localised existence of werewolfism, the situation was quite different in the Middle Ages in Europe. At this time the process of man-into-beast was supposed to be a phenomenon of daily occurrence. And even today, in remote regions of Europe and Scandinavia, the superstition has not entirely lost its old power to grip the imagination of simple country folk.

But superstition is the religion of feeble minds, as the 18th-century British statesman Edmund Burke observed in another context, and it is certainly the very lifeblood of the werewolf legend. Though doubtless purely



Left: a medicine man of the Blackfoot American Indian tribe, in an illustration of about 1830. It is easy to see how the habit of dressing up in animal skins for ritual purposes may have given rise to stories of were-animals

Below: Nebuchadnezzar, from an engraving by William Blake. The great Babylonian King suffered a strange kind of malady: after having incurred the wrath of God, he was 'driven from men, and did eat grass as oxen, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven, till his hairs were grown like the eagles' feathers, and his nails like birds' claws'

mythical in its origin, it nonetheless presents in its developed state a curious mixture of mythical, historical, demoniacal and psychological elements.

Modern science finds in werewolfism little that can be readily explained, and much that cannot be explained satisfactorily: the superstition, stemming from a period 1000 years before Christianity, contains a great deal that cannot be rationalised by modern thought.

Man's social development has for many centuries been strengthening those benevolent feelings that distinguish us from animals. Our primitive bestial impulses are consequently dying for want of exercise, or being suppressed by stringent laws of the land. But this process, which transforms us from primitive savage into so-called civilised people, is a very slow one; and now and then there occur cases of what psychologists call atavism, or reversion to an ancestral, or primitive, type of character.

From time to time, in civilised countries, people are born possessed of bestial appetites and cravings, a delight in fiendish cruelty and a liking for human flesh. Modern psychology knows how to classify and explain these abnormal cases, but to the unscientific, highly susceptible medieval mind they were explicable only as works of the Devil.

So perhaps there is nothing strange in the fact that, in an age when the prevailing thought rendered the transformation of men into werewolves an easily admissible notion, these monsters of cruelty and depraved appetite should have been regarded as capable of taking on bestial forms.

As civilisation advances so, one by one, the animal 'horror' myths disappear with the



animals that gave rise to them. The Sioux Indians of North Dakota, USA, for instance, once believed very strongly in the appearance of a monstrous animal that swallowed human beings; the Sioux today, however, think very differently for, having forgotten their ancient mythology, they now realise that the superstition was suggested by nothing more terrifying than the bones of prehistoric mastodons, which are often found in the North Dakotan plains.

The starting point of the werewolf superstition, as we have seen, is the habit of members of primitive societies of disguising themselves as animals when roaming the countryside as foragers or scouts. Like wolves, they wandered in search of food. It is easy to see how reports would also represent them as possessing in their disguise all the ferocious qualities of the animal they impersonated – and finally even of actually taking on animal form, either wholly or in part, for longer or shorter periods of time.

Some of the North American Indian werewolf stories represent men as having only the head, hands and feet of a wolf. The werewolf transformation in France, Germany, Scandinavia and some East European countries is caused by a shirt or girdle made of wolfskin – a survival of the robe or mantle originally disguising the entire body.

#### Delusional insanity

In the early part of the 17th century, when the French werewolf boy Jean Grenier (see page 761) was put on trial for the murder of several children, the court displayed a depth of compassion unusual for the period. It took into account both the boy's tender age (he was 13) and medical opinion, which was that Grenier was a victim of delusional insanity, or lycanthropy; and so he was dispatched, not to the flames of the stake, but to a term of life imprisonment within the walls of the Franciscan monastery in Bordeaux.

The idea of a werewolf being the victim of insanity was by no means new – a few years earlier 14 people tried in France for sorcery and werewolf transformations were subsequently acquitted – but Grenier's case does mark the beginning of a significant new approach to werewolfism. Judges, finding it difficult to ignore any longer the mounting outcry of the doctors, were themselves becoming more and more convinced that many suspected werewolves were in fact patients suffering from various forms of mental delusion – a form of madness not helped by the potent drugs and incantations with which many of these patients indulged themselves.

It was from this time that men of law and medicine started to subdivide people with animal delusions into two quite distinct categories: *werewolves* and *lycanthropes*. The werewolf was the mythical creature, the lycanthrope the mental patient.

All over Europe, scholars were applying new definitions to the malady. The great

## A case of mistaken identity



Below: the execution of the burgomeister-turned-werewolf of Ansbach, which took place in 1685. The event lived on in the minds of the citizens of Ansbach for many years; this painting is by the court painter Johann Schwabeda, who lived from 1737 to 1817



Could there be a connection between werewolves and the pitiful victims of a rare disease known as porphyria? Dr Lee Illis, of Guy's Hospital, London, explains that porphyria results in severe sensitivity to light, red or reddish brown teeth, and nervous manifestations – ranging from 'mild hysteria to manic-depressive psychoses and delirium'.

These symptoms tie in well with many medieval werewolf reports – but the horrific skin lesions of the porphyria victim could hardly be mistaken for the skin of a werewolf. Admittedly, the ancient scholar Altomarus describes werewolves in their human form as having 'hollow eyes, very dry and pale'. But this is an isolated description. As far as can be ascertained, there are no other accounts in the literature of werewolfism to corroborate Dr Illis's theory that werewolves are, in reality, nothing but victims of the horrible disease of porphyria.

English clergyman-scholar Robert Burton, in his classic medical treatise *The anatomy of melancholy* (1621), called it quite simply 'wolf-madness' ('... when men run howling about graves and fields in the night, and will not be persuaded but that they are wolves'). In the 17th century Alfonso Ponce de Santa Cruz, physician to Spain's Philip II, put the illness down to a symptom of melancholic humour, a product of the bile that, medieval doctors believed, attacks the brain.

Today doctors regard the delusional aspects of lycanthropy as psychological in origin. *The world history of psychiatry* (1975) explains that hypochondria can sometimes develop into lycanthropy. To illustrate the point, the book gives a disturbing contemporary account of a 30-year-old patient who first fell into a melancholy, then developed a monomania which made him believe that he was transformed into a wolf (lycanthropy); he fled from men and sought refuge in the mountains, where he spent the nights howling, visiting the graveyard and invoking the dead.

It is not difficult to imagine how such prisoners of delusional insanity, in the less enlightened 17th century, could be persuaded to 'confess' with very little trouble to stories of bloodshed and werewolf metamorphosis. That thousands of people have been executed because of the popular belief in werewolves is a matter of common fact: the court records tell us as much. But it is yet another instance of the fatal ease with which superstition has turned disease itself – here a clear case of lycanthropy – into food for its love of cruelty. It is also a monument to pure ignorance.

But to return to more recent matters: in his classic book on sadism, masochism and

lycanthropy, *Man into wolf* (1951), the British anthropologist Dr Robert Eisler makes the fascinating observation that Adolf Hitler may have suffered from the disease of lycanthropy. Dr Eisler refers to the now legendary eyewitness account of the Führer 'biting the carpet' in his fits of rage. 'If the stories about Hitler's rages are true,' explains the doctor, 'they would appear to have been manic lycanthropic states.'

### Cruel murder and the werewolf

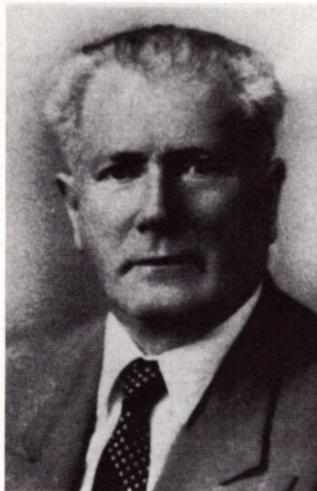
The American psychoanalyst Dr Nandor Fodor interprets lycanthropy not so much as a psychological condition but as a 'psychic mechanism'. Dr Fodor attaches great importance to dreams, especially those in which transformation, bloodshed, cruel murder and the werewolf form an integral part. His interpretation of such lycanthropic dreams became the subject of several books and of an important paper published in the *Journal of American Folklore* in 1945. Here is one example from his casebook:

A London woman awakes in the morning to find two gleaming eyes in the head of a wolf-shaped animal glaring at her from near the fireplace. In terror, she switches on the light, whereupon the animal vanishes. She believes it was a werewolf.

On being asked for associations, wolf becomes the name of a man through whom she had lost a lot of money and who had climbed into her bedroom in France at night and threatened to strangle her if she would not leave her husband and be his. By his brown, large and baleful eyes, he qualified for the werewolf. Only – the werewolf vision took place before the man invaded the lady's bedroom. Nevertheless, the association gives us a clue to the understanding of her hypnopompic hallucination. It represents her sexual sadistic expectations. The glare in the eye of the wolf was the glow of her own desire for assault and the fireplace was a fitting topographical symbol for the passion with which she burned.

Lycanthropy and werewolfism clearly form a complex subject, littered with numerous booby-traps, and to comprehend it fully one should consider such matters as black magic, cannibalism, insanity, low intelligence, gullibility, sadism, inebriation, susceptibility, fantasy, astral projection – and rabies. Ancient medicine could easily have confused the lycanthropic form of psychosis with contagious canine rabies, communicable to dogs by the bite of wolves and to man by the bite of a dog, which causes man and dog to snap and bite everything within reach and so to spread the terrible disease.

For thousands of years, the principal factor in recognising a werewolf was by the frothing at the mouth – a symptom that also



Above: the American psychoanalyst Dr Nandor Fodor, who believes that lycanthropy is a 'psychic mechanism': even if they do not exhibit werewolf-like behaviour, many people work out problems on the subconscious level through violent lycanthropic dreams

identifies the human rabid patient. So was the Roman poet Ovid, when referring to Lycaon's transformation into a wolf, in fact basing his description on either a rabid wolf or a rabid man? He says of Lycaon:

In vain he attempted to speak; from that very instant  
His jaws were besplattered with foam,  
and only he thirsted  
For blood, as he raged among flocks  
and panted for slaughter.

Ovid is talking, in fact, about a werewolf. Being bitten by a werewolf, tradition has it, will make the victim a werewolf; and being bitten by a rabid wolf will make the victim rabid. Imagine the dilemma of the rustic mind, for whom a rabid wolf was quite simply a raging werewolf, and imagine his terror if he was subsequently attacked by the diseased animal and developed all the symptoms of rabies. To observers, he was a werewolf.

So, werewolves may be interpreted as people suffering from a terrible disease, delusional as well as contagious. Or the belief in them could be the result of continuing superstitions dating back to primitive cultures and based in fact. One plausible explanation involves dreams, for if a mentally unbalanced person frequently dreamed that he was a wolf, might he not one day become convinced that he really was one?

There are scientists today who have not completely rejected the possibility that werewolves may have existed; for is it really reasonable to suppose that legend, if it has no factual basis, can survive on fancy alone? If it is so much nonsense, this perennial belief in animal metamorphosis, why should learned men of science and medicine in all ages have spent so much time studying it?

Right: a man being pursued by a rabid wolf, from an illustration by Howard Pyle for *Harper's Monthly Magazine* of December 1909. A man bitten by a rabid wolf becomes rabid; it is easy to see how rabies sufferers could be transformed, in the popular imagination, into werewolves



#### Further reading

- Robert Eisler, *Man into wolf*, Spring Books 1951
- Montague Summers, *The werewolf*, Kegan Paul 1933
- Ian Woodward, *The werewolf delusion*, Paddington Press 1979

# A bizarre preservation



**The phenomenon of dead bodies that do not decay may often be explained in natural terms but, as BOB RICKARD points out, there remain many cases of incorruption that defy rational explanation**

THE RECORDS OF THE SAINTS of the Catholic Church contain the greatest concentration of incorruptibles – bodies of mystics who, in the words of the Church historian Father Thurston, have resisted ‘the horror of the tomb’. However, Roman Catholics have no monopoly of bodies that defy decay: they are met with in every branch of the Christian Church, and also among the other religions. For example, descriptions strikingly similar to the Catholic accounts are to be found in the Chinese annals known as *The lives of the Buddhist saints*.

The story of Hui Neng, one of the best known of the Ch'an (or Zen) patriarchs, particularly echoes in some respects the violation of the body of St Andrew Bobola by Red Army troops (see page 777). Hui Neng died in AD 712 and was buried in the Kuo-en

Above: the head of a Tollund man, dating from the Danish Iron Age. A sacrificial victim, killed by strangulation, he has been perfectly preserved – if extremely discoloured – by the natural chemical processes of the bog into which he was thrown

Below: the remains of Wilhelm Von Ellenborgen who died in Philadelphia in 1792. Most of his body has turned into adipocere, a soap-like substance thought to be created by the nearby ground water

monastery where he had taught, in Kwantung province. During the fall of the Sung Dynasty, in 1276, Mongol troops dragged out his body to see for themselves his rumoured miraculous preservation. After 564 years the Zen master's skin was still flexible and glossy, and there was no sign of collapsing or shrinking. The desecrators then cut open the body to find the heart and liver in a perfect condition. They were impressed enough to depart immediately without further sacrilege.

## A 'divine favour'

The phenomenon occurs today, as the following examples drawn from outside the specific Catholic context clearly prove. In 1977, a family grave in Espartinas, Spain, was opened to inter the body of a local man. The sexton and his helpers were shocked to find that the body of the man's son was still intact after 40 years. The boy, José Garcia Moreno, died in 1937 of meningitis at the age of 11, and the family deny that he was embalmed. Soon the whole village had viewed the body in its rotting grave-clothes – and, believing the boy must have been a saint to be so ‘favoured’, have begun to petition Rome for his canonisation. However, as Father Thurston points out, phenomena such as stigmata, visions, levitation or incorruption are less important to the Congregation for the Causes of Saints in the recognition of a saint than a life of piety and virtue.

One case has come to light with only minimal religious colouring. In 1644, a beautiful Hungarian countess, Zofia Bosniakova, died at the age of 35, having been married twice and bearing one son. Her first husband died within a year of her marriage at 17, and the brawling promiscuous ways of her second husband – Franco Wesselényi, a renowned swordsman and diplomat – made her retreat into a simple, pious and private life in Strečno Castle, in northern Slovakia. During renovations of the castle in 1689 her coffin was opened to reveal her flawless beauty. The local history, which may not be entirely reliable, says ‘The Lady of Strečno’, although not beatified, lies in state today in a



## A legend in the making



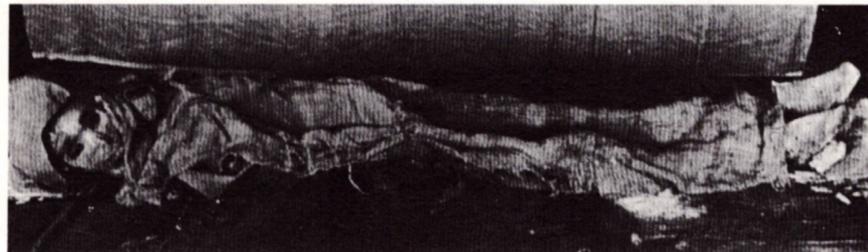
church in Teplice-Sanov, Czechoslovakia, in a robe she made herself. She is still beautiful after 336 years.

There is another case that gives the usual pious morality of these stories a new twist. It concerns the body of a German knight, called Christian Kahlbutz, who sounds as if he might have been the model for Countess Zofia's second husband. Kahlbutz bravely acquitted himself in 1675, defending his homeland of Brandenburg against the Swedish invaders. But domestically he was a tyrant, who, among other abuses, insisted on his *droit de seigneur* (the feudal custom that allowed a lord to usurp a peasant bridegroom's conjugal rights on the wedding night). Besides his own 11 children, it seems he fathered more than 30 on local girls. It was when one of them refused his advances that he revenged himself by killing her fiancé. The girl took him to court, but he escaped justice because of his social position and by swearing solemnly: 'If I was the murderer, then shall the good Lord never let my body rot.' He died in 1702, and it was not until over 90 years later, when the new lords of the manor were renovating the local church, that his incorrupt body was found in its coffin, and the crime that everyone believed he committed was openly confirmed.

No doubt large parts of this story are a curious mixture of folklore and the opportunism of local moralists, but the unusual preservation of the knight's body seems a verifiable fact. During the 1936 Berlin Olympic Games, coachloads of visitors were taken to the village of Kampehl (now in East Germany) to see the browned and desiccated body in its open coffin. So many people were writing graffiti on the shroud, which had remained intact since his burial, that a glass top had to be placed over the coffin. In 1895, Rudolf Virchow, a well-known pathologist,

At the end of 1980 in the ancient city of Kano in northern Nigeria, state troops were called in to quell a riot caused by the followers of a heretical Muslim cult, led by the self-styled prophet Muham-madu Marwa (or Maitatsine, as he was also known). Marwa established his headquarters in Kano during the 1960s and since then he is said to have attracted some 10,000 followers. Tension between his sect and the orthodox Muslims exploded into riot in December 1980, during which as many as 8000 people were killed, including Marwa.

At first Marwa was buried in the bare earth in a shallow grave, but three weeks later the Governor gave orders that his body be exhumed and placed on ice at the city mortuary (left). Rumour soon spread among the people of Kano that Marwa's body was miraculously incorruptible.



Top: the 'young lady of Loulan' was unearthed in China's remote Xinjiang province in 1981. Experts claim that this 6470-year-old mummy is the oldest in the world

Above: Julia Buccola Petta, when her body was exhumed in 1927 – six years after her death. Her lifelike preservation was believed to be miraculous; this photograph was taken to be made into the plaque that now adorns her grave in Mount Carmel Cemetery, Hillside, Illinois

had carried out an autopsy. He failed to find any trace of embalming preservatives, and confirmed that the internal organs and the general condition of the body were remarkably good. At least one other medical expedition set out from Berlin to investigate and test various alternative theories, but left the riddle as intact as the body.

So what are the hypotheses most frequently put forward as alternatives to the idea of a miracle? To begin with, there are various kinds of embalming, but they can safely be ignored since in most of the fully authenticated cases it is clear from medical examination that no preservatives had been used and none of the viscera removed as is essential in embalming. Some bodies, however, like that of St Francis Xavier, did have internal organs removed for use as holy relics; the incorruptible state was discovered only when the tomb was first opened to take relics.

Joan Cruz, author of *The incorruptibles*, outlined three categories of preserved bodies. Those preserved deliberately; the accidentally or naturally preserved; and the true incorruptibles. Those that fit into the second category show effects no less wonderful for having a mundane explanation. Father Thurston and Cruz cite many places that have reputations for preserving human bodies (and not always in a mummified form). Cruz mentions the discovery of a

natural mummy in a mountain cave in Chile in 1954, thought to be the body of a boy who had been drugged and left there to freeze as a sacrifice about 500 years previously. Bodies of Iron Age people have been found perfectly preserved in peat bogs in Denmark, Ireland and Scotland, but they are greatly discoloured by natural chemical processes. Preservations in alcohol, formaldehyde, honey, rum, sand, salt, and many other unusual compounds – including guano – have been known, but such bodies are not true incorruptibles.

Certain sites have been deliberately chosen as burial grounds because their natural conditions delayed the onset or acceleration of decomposition. The Capuchin catacombs of Palermo and Malta are famous for their gruesome specimens, of which one 19th-century travel writer wrote: 'They are all dressed in the clothes they usually wore . . . the skin and muscles become as dry and hard as a piece of stockfish, and though many of them have been here upwards of two

A grisly display of dead Capuchin monks, hanging like so many broken dolls in the catacombs in Palermo, Sicily. Most bodies left exposed to the air decay approximately eight times faster than those that are buried – but the air in these catacombs has the peculiar property of drying out the bodies and turning them into natural mummies



hundred and fifty years, yet none are reduced to skeletons.' In the 18th century burial in the lead-lined crypt of the cathedral at Bremen became fashionable among the German aristocracy, after the discovery of the astonishingly well-preserved body of a workman who had met with a fatal accident down there several years earlier and had never been found.

The vaults under St Michan's Church in Dublin have similar qualities. A survey of the church in 1901 mentions the striking example of 'a pathetic baby corpse, from whose plump wrists still hang the faded white ribbons of its funeral', with the date 1679 on the coffin. The preservative effect is believed to be caused by the extreme dryness of the air and its freedom from dust – conditions that also prevail in the necropolis at Kiev, Russia, in which a large number of withered bodies lie in their open coffins (now covered with glass). As in the case of the German knight, radiation was suggested as the preserving agent of the 250-year-old desiccated bodies found in the Wasserburg Somersdorf Castle, at Mittelfranken, also in Germany. Even though tiny amounts of radiation have been detected in the castle tombs, we cannot generalise from this to explain all odd mummifications, nor the truly intact bodies. At each of the above sites the bodies have finally become shrivelled, horribly distorted and extremely rigid. These conditions, as Joan Cruz points out, simply do not apply to the true cases, which 'are quite moist and flexible, even after the passage of centuries.'

#### Preserved – as soap

A further consideration is the curious natural process known as *saponification*. In this, as the name suggests, the body tissues are turned into an ammoniacal soap beneath a toughened outer skin. This soap-like substance is called 'adipocere' (from the Latin *adeps* for fat, and *cera* meaning wax) – or *gras de cadavre* (French, meaning 'corpse fat') – and is caused by burial in damp soil in the proximity of putrefaction. Why it develops in some cases and not others is unknown. Monsieur Thouret, who was commissioned to clear the cemetery of the Church of the Holy Innocents in Paris, in 1785, found that many bodies had converted to adipocere:

The bodies themselves, having lost nothing of their bulk, and appearing to be wrapped in their shrouds, like so many larvae, had, to all seeming, suffered no decay. On tearing apart the grave-clothes which enveloped them, the only change one noticed consisted in this, that they had been converted into a flabby mass or substance the whiteness of which stood out the more clearly in contrast to the blackness in which they lay.

Their plumpness, eyes and hair were all unimpaired after five years or more.

Saponification is unusual but not rare –

## Incorruptible corpses

there is a saponified soldier from the United States Civil War period in the Smithsonian Museum, Washington – and occurrences among the religious have not caused any undue excitement; although, when medical knowledge was more primitive, it seems likely that a few cases of alleged incorruption might be attributed to adipocere. In support of this idea he describes the exhumation of Blessed Marie de Sainte-Euphrasie Pelletier, who died in 1868. Thirty-five years later her lead coffin was opened to reveal the recognisable features of the foundress of the Good Shepherd Nuns. 'The mouth was slightly open, the eyes shut, the eyelashes intact,' wrote one examining doctor. Without unclothing the body, he was 'able to ascertain that the chest, the abdomen, the thighs and the legs were covered with a skin like that of a mummy, under which was a mass of *gras de cadavre*, resulting from the saponification of the tissues underneath.' A second doctor added: 'I may say that, in general, the skin, mummy-like, hard to the touch, and resonant when struck by a metal instrument,



covers a substance spread over all the body. This substance is vulgarly called *gras de cadavre*; it covers the bones.' It is fair to conclude that the presence of adipocere is easily recognised and verified by a medical examiner, and without doubt would have been noted in any post-mortem examinations of the allegedly incorrupt since dissection could hardly have failed to reveal it.

True incorruption triumphs over the condition of the body, the circumstances of the burial and the normal processes of decomposition. For some reason a certain body stays intact while others, in the same place, rot into

## In death as in life



Left: an ancient Egyptian mummy, thousands of years old, now on show at Cairo Museum. This man was the beneficiary of the embalmers' highly-developed skills, though they were not bought cheaply. Ironically, the last resting places of the poor – not elaborate tombs, but just the hot sands of the desert – have proved to be the best preserving agent

The official opening of William the Conqueror's tomb at the Church of St Etienne, or L'Abbaye-aux-hommes, in Caen, north-west France, in 1552 caused great amazement. For although the soldier-king had been entombed for over 400 years his body – and particularly his face – remained remarkably well-preserved and lifelike. It is true that he had been embalmed, but in the rather primitive fashion of his day; a body treated in this way would normally have turned to dust many years before.

A local artist was commissioned to paint William's posthumous portrait (left); he used the corpse as a model, but chose to dress him in contemporary clothes. Thus William the Conqueror became the image of an early Renaissance prince.

the dust from whence they came. The Catholic Church sees it as a 'divine favour' to a pious soul, although it is not, on its own, enough for beatification (except in the Russian Orthodox Church). Joan Cruz summarises the value of the relics for Catholics: 'For those of us who have loved and admired certain of these saints, it is a comfort of sorts to know that they are not just somewhere in the great realms beyond, but that their actual bodies, which will one day be made glorious, are still present among us.'

But objective researchers are not blessed with such certainty, for they see authenticated cases occurring outside the Catholic Church, and in most cultures. Nor is incorruption restricted to the saintly. A secular case, typical of the form in which one might encounter it in folklore, was reported in the *News of the World* on 8 May 1977. It concerned Nadja Mattei, who died in Rome in 1965, aged two. Her mother claimed that for 12 years her dead daughter came to her in dreams begging to be fetched from her coffin. Early in 1977 the authorities granted her request for exhumation, and baby Nadja's body was found to be quite free of putrefaction.

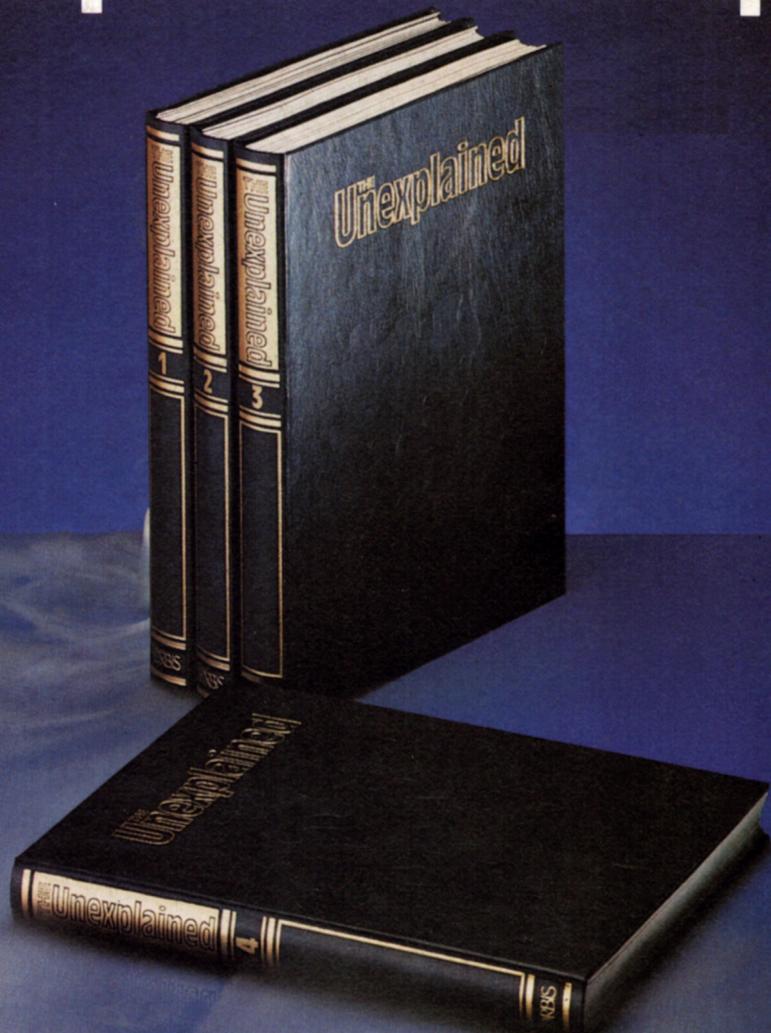
Authenticated true incorruption is very rare, and each story, both in the religious context and outside it, has a similar structure: an incorrupt body, an eerie persistent fragrance, and frequently some attendant paranormal phenomena, such as strange lights around the grave or revelation of incorruption through a dream. The universal similarity in these accounts suggests some kind of archetypal event that transcends ordinary reality. The questions it raises strike to the core of the nature of our physical and spiritual existence, and the nature of reality itself.

### Further reading

Joan Carroll Cruz, *The incorruptibles*, Tan Book and Publishers Inc. (Rockford, Illinois) 1977  
Albert Farges, *Mystical phenomena*, Burns, Oates & Washbourne Ltd 1926  
Herbert Thurston, *The physical phenomena of mysticism*, Henry Regnery Co. (Chicago) 1959



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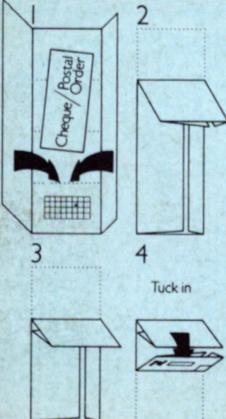


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